1: Turnbull F-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

776 the body (p. 238). There is also some confusion
775 among the net-hunter Mbuti between the terms *mungu* and *satani*, which at times appear to be interchangeable. Schebesta (1948, 493) says that the local Bira refer to these forest sprites as "*molimo*," the name they also give to their secret association of men.

776 As with the archers, abnormal conditions of the physical world denote the presence of the chthonic God. At such times the net hunters are careful not to expose themselves to his sight, which would bring death, nor to attract his attention by unseemly behavior. He is a benevolent God but one best kept at a distance. There is no evidence of any connection between God and the lineage through the elder, but each hunting band seems to regard Mungu, while God of all Mbuti everywhere, as being particularly concerned with them.[1]

Cult Practices

• 788 In so far as ritual is a response to uncertainty
182 or crisis, the net hunters have far less need of it than many other peoples. As we show above, their forest environment provides them with

[1] In view of the extremely loose usage of the term mungu, I interpret net-hunter expressed attitudes as indicating a belief in a local deity, not necessarily named Mungu, somehow related to the over-all God.

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1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
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[P-237-C]

the basic necessities of life. No seasonal change involves them in any significant change of activity (except possibly the honey season, when game hunting may be abandoned). The economy of the Mbuti further militates against elaborate ritual by preventing the easy manufacture of ritual trappings and by not allowing for any substantial form of sacrifice. Nor is it possible to provide time and men for ritual specialization. This much applies throughout the Ituri. However, the net hunters, by their hunting techniques, are assured of a larger and steadier supply of game than the archers. Nevertheless, crises occur. The Mbuti, for instance, are frequently beset with the tempestuous rainstorms that sweep the forest in the afternoons and, more rarely, during the night or early morning. Putnam (1948, 338) points out that these storms not only cause physical discomfort in the hunting camp, where huts may become flooded and the clearing so swamped in mud that the whole camp must be moved, but they also prevent hunting and bring death through lightning or through causing dead branches to fall on people. Putnam writes: "No other element in their life causes so much disturbance or upsets them so profoundly" (1948, 338).

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
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338). The Mbuti associate the storms with water, rain, thunder, lightning, rainbows, and snakes, and possibly fire. The net hunters have a particular fear of water and, as do the local villagers, seem to believe in water spirits, or, as they call them, "water animals." These are most frequently associated with death. A water animal is connected with the rainbow, perhaps the most dreaded of all natural phenomena.

As might be expected therefore, such ritual as exists is most often connected with the storm and its symbols. Putnam, who knew of Schebesta's account of ritual among the archers, did not disagree with it in so far as cult practices were described among the net hunters. However, cult practices are far less common, and he mentions no spirit huts or shrines such as were described by Schebesta (1950, 77). Food offerings may be thrown into the undergrowth, though specific information is lacking. I have met net hunters who stoutly deny that they would waste food in this way; certainly I never saw any offerings being made. But Putnam disagrees strongly that prayer or invocation is involved. The net hunters, he says (in unpublished works), do not invoke the storm god or

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1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

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any other god or spiritual being for protection or aid. Mbuti ritual, such as it is, is simply "A number of symbolic actions performed as parts of technological operations in order to smooth over the disturbance caused by some kind of change," e.g., the elephant-hunting ritual in which the youngest male descendant of the hunter ritually pierces the elephant's side and opens the operations dividing the meat for consumption (cf. p. 207).

Putnam, further, was never convinced that the Mbuti had any notion similar to the European notion of God. He disagrees strongly with Schebesta's interpretation of Mbuti religious practice as indicating a belief in a personal god. He suggests that the ritual practices described by Schebesta were, in fact, no more than sympathetic magic, and that a belief in the direct cause and effect in their magical practices is the only kind of "religious" belief that can safely be ascribed to the forest dwellers, Pygmy or villager.

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
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dence among the net hunters of a belief in a personal god. He asserts that all their ritual actions can be explained in terms of direct cause-and-effect belief, without any reference to spiritual beings. The Putnam material itself, however, indicates some notion of spiritual existence and power, although in nothing like the highly formalized system that Schebesta attributes to the archers. Coon, in his notes on an interview with Putnam (*in* Patrick Putnam, 1948), points out that the water animal is in a sense a personification of the storm, as is the belief that the neolithic axheads found throughout the forest are excreta dropped by lightning.

It is largely a question of degree. The material available is not sufficient for us to make any useful observations on the net-hunters' theology or cosmology. All that can be said is that there is a belief in a benevolent power associated with the forest (which may or may not be the *molimo*) and a power symbolized by the rainbow, or as a water animal, and associated with death. Whether these are two aspects of the same divinity, two distinct divinities, or unconnected with any notion of divinity cannot be said.